

Women's Quest For Occupational Equality: The Case Of Jewish Female Agricultural Workers in Pre-State Israel

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I. Introduction

There is a common belief that Israeli women have achieved gender equality over and above that attained in America and European countries. Evidence cited to support this is the fact that women routinely serve in the Israeli army and the country elected a woman, Golda Meir, as prime minister. Equality between men and women is claimed to date back to the days at the beginning of the century when both sexes worked shoulder to shoulder in road construction and land reclamation (Bernstein, 1992: 2). The years 1904–14 and 1919–23, known in Zionist history as the Second and Third *Aliyah* (waves of immigration), were indeed formative times during which the dominant values of the society were shaped and the infrastructure of future organizations was laid (Eisenstadt, 1967; Izraeli, 1981). The immigrants who arrived during this period, known as *halutzim* (male pioneers) and *halutzot* (female pioneers) were idealistic nationalists from Eastern Europe. They were young and single, and came with the express purpose of rebuilding Zion and creating a new type of egalitarian and labor-oriented society.

These years also proved crucial for the status of women. A readiness for experimentation and social creativity existed, and the conditions for redefining traditional roles between the sexes were most favorable. Moreover, the Zionist *halutzim* were deeply committed to social equality. Women had been integrated in various groups and activities prior to their immigration, and this experience created expectations for gender equality after the move as well. The female pioneers wished to be equal partners in the national enterprise, and their incentive was clearly ideological rather than financial. They were more concerned about making an equal contribution in the sphere of agriculture than receiving equal pay. They spoke in the language of equal obligations and duties rather than equal rights and rewards.

In this paper, we shall focus on one aspect of gender equality, namely occupational similarity. The first issue we would like to address is whether or not occupational similarity existed, and whether the occupational distribution between men and women in pre-state Israel was indeed comparable. Our findings show that a sharp contrast existed between ideological and social commitment to gender equality and gender equality in practice. In an attempt to account for these findings, we shall draw upon economic theories of segregation and discrimination, and analyze the case of Palestine in the light of demand-side and supply-side explanations. A demand-side explanation accentuates the different preferences, skills and qualifications of the two sexes, whereas a supply-side explanation emphasizes discrimination and disinformation. A better understanding of occupational segregation at the time will also shed light on various endeavors to remedy the problem. One of the major responses was the establishment of training farms and collectives for women. After exploring this response, we shall speculate on whether it was congruent with our model and whether the situation was genuinely altered as a result.

We are not the first to deal with the status of women in the Zionist Labor Movement (Fishman, 1929; Maimon (Fishman), 1955), and even our core issue (women's farming collectives) has been the subject of several papers (Blum, 1980; Shilo, 1980; Izraeli, 1981; Bernstein, 1987). But the point of departure has always been sociological or historical. The present paper treats the issue from an economic point of view, employing economic theories developed since the 1960s. Using modern labor market theories to gain insight into a market that operated some fifty years before these theories were introduced is a particularly fascinating undertaking. In the course of this paper, we shall attempt to provide quantitative, in addition to descriptive, analysis although access to quantitative data is limited. Our searches in the Central Zionist Archives and Labor Movement Archives turned up mainly indicative data in the form of reports, correspondence and newspaper articles. We will also rely on censuses conducted by the Zionist Organization and the Labor Movement in 1913, 1919, 1926 and 1937, although they are very limited in scope and the presentation and analysis of the data is not very clear. Despite these data limitations, the use of archival material has enabled us to pinpoint occupational dissimilarity between the sexes, explore the reasons behind it, and trace the unique path adopted by the *haluzot* of pre-state Israel to fight against it.

The paper is organized in six sections. Following the Introduction, Section II provides an historical background for the period in question (1904–43); Section III presents a theoretical economic framework and analyzes the case of Palestine from this perspective; Section IV describes the women's efforts to eliminate gender-based occupational dissimilarity, and these efforts, that resulted in greater integration in agriculture, are evaluated in Section V. Summary and conclusions are offered in the last section.

II. Historical Background: The Centrality of Agricultural Settlement and Women's Quest for Equality

For the Zionist Movement which emerged in Eastern Europe at the close of the nineteenth century with the goal of resettling the Jewish people in Palestine, the return to agriculture was of especial importance. There were two principal reasons for this. First of all, the

Zionists sought to change the occupational structure of the Jewish community, which had hitherto focused on commerce, finance and brokerage. These were perceived as exploitative, parasitic occupations which had bred anti-semitism. The Jews were thus urged to embrace productive occupations such as farming, which would make them more independent and improve them as human beings. A return to the soil was viewed as a balm for all the ills of Jewish society. Another reason for attaching such importance to farming was that agricultural settlement would ensure the physical occupation of the land and lead the way to the attainment of the political goals of the Zionist Movement (Ettinger, 1969: 179–83; 203–206; Katz, 1992: 63–6; Ussishkin, 1905).

Given the centrality of agriculture in Zionist thinking, the establishment of farm colonies was begun almost from the inception of the Zionist Movement. From 1882 until the outbreak of World War I, some 49 Jewish colonies were set up in Palestine (Nawratzki, 1914: 538–9) inhabited by nearly 11,500 people. This was approximately 13% of the Jewish population at the time (Eliav, 1978: 335). However, due to the difficult economic conditions in Palestine and the restrictions imposed by the Ottoman authorities, the colonies became dependent upon the philanthropy of the Baron Edmond de Rothschild and the financial assistance of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), *Hibbat Zion* and the Zionist Movement (Katz, 1992: 63–6).

Most of the Jewish agricultural settlements prior to World War I were of the *moshava* type. These were nuclear agricultural communities which resembled the European villages of the period. The families of the *moshava* generally owned their farms and cultivated them on an individual basis. They were clustered around Jaffa, south of Haifa and in the Upper and Lower Galilee. Their location was dictated first and foremost by the availability of land for purchase. The original plan was for farms based on the cultivation of grain, but when this did not prove economically feasible, the emphasis shifted to plantations (Ben-Arieh, 1981: 85–96; Ben-Artzi, 1988; Ben-Artzi, 1989: 141–6; Grossman, 1992: 147–63; Grossman and Katz, 1992: 61–65). Until 1904, the Jewish agricultural population was composed of middle-class Orthodox Jews from Eastern Europe who came to Palestine motivated by Zionism. When the *moshavot* (plural of *moshava*) found themselves on the brink of financial collapse, Baron de Rothschild of Paris agreed to take them under his wing. However, they were hereafter managed entirely by the Baron's officials and the settlers themselves lost control over their own affairs. The Baron's officials introduced plantations on a wider scale, especially vineyards, but this branch demanded intensive seasonal cultivation which proved beyond the capacity of families working individually. These factors, as well as the disproportion between the level of assistance provided by the Baron and the farmers' actual profit, led many of them to give up working the land. They devoted themselves to managing the farms and brought in low-paid Arab workers to do the physical labor. The JCA, which took over the *moshavot* from Baron de Rothschild in 1900, sought to correct this inequity. In the settlements established by the association in the Lower Galilee, it lay down conditions which tied the farmers and their families to the soil. For one, these *moshavot* were based on grain crops which kept the farmers in the fields all year long. In addition, they were prohibited from taking on hired laborers (Aaronsohn, 1981: 25–84; Katz, 1988/92: 63–9; Schama, 1978: chapters 1–4).

In 1904, another wave of immigration swept the country, bringing a new generation of agricultural workers. The pioneers of the Second *Aliyah* were young Russian Jews, most of them single, indigent, and rebels against Orthodoxy. On the other hand, they were suffused with a deep sense of idealism and were prepared to devote their lives to Jewish national rebirth in Palestine. In one form or another, these young people had been influenced by the socialist ideology which had spread throughout Russia, and they were anxious to implement these ideas in Palestine. They were not a large group; by 1914, they totalled 1,300 or 1.5% of the Jewish population. However, their social impact was disproportionate to their numbers. They founded the workers' parties and affiliated organizations, and laid the infrastructure for the Labor Movement. This led the Jewish community in Palestine for many years and after the establishment of the state, became a powerful force in the Israeli government. Ideologically committed to 'Hebrew labor', the pioneers of the Second *Aliyah* took action to root out Arab agricultural workers and replace them with Jews. They formed groups and collectives, and worked as hired hands wherever possible. Later, they added the 'conquest of the land' to their banner and established their own settlements. At the initiative of the Palestine Office of the Zionist Organization, three training farms were set up for agricultural workers. Kibbutz Deganiah, founded in 1909, was an outgrowth of these farms. The *halutzim* who came to Palestine prior to World War I, together with their compatriots who arrived afterwards, thus provided the human energy for the creation of new models of cooperative settlement. The *kibbutz* and the *moshav* became¹ the predominant forms of agricultural settlement in Palestine, epitomizing the Zionist pioneering spirit, and they remain so today (Eliav, 1978: 335–54; Bein, 1976: 22–98; Kolat, 1964).

Among the pioneers of the Second *Aliyah*, there were also a number of women, generally unmarried, who were fired by Jewish nationalism and socialist values. At first, these *halutzot* constituted only a minute proportion of the worker population. By 1913, however, they totalled 19% (194 out of 971). They were totally different in character from the farmers' wives who had arrived in Palestine from 1882 onwards. The latter viewed themselves as housewives and were not at all involved in agriculture. Neither wives nor daughters received agricultural training, and they felt no direct connection with the land. Most of the women were religiously Orthodox, which also led them to concentrate on traditional household duties and shy away from male occupations. In contradistinction, the *halutzot* sought an equal role in fulfilling the national obligations of 'Hebrew labor' and 'conquest of the land'. They perceived these obligations as no less relevant to women as to men. Hence their ambition to be involved in all branches of agricultural work. The fact that they were non-religious and no longer shackled by the duties of the Orthodox household made it easier for them to take up the vocations to which they aspired in Palestine (Shilo, 1980: 81–8; Izraeli, 1984: 109–20; Fishman, 1929: chapter 1).

Nonetheless, the path of these *halutzot* was strewn with obstacles. The older farmers, who from the outset preferred Arab labor as cheaper and more professional than Jewish labor, objected to the *halutzot* on moral-religious grounds. Their demand for independence and the right to work alongside men was considered indecent, and the farmers took pains to separate their daughters from this milieu. Although the workers had

expressed their desire to predicate the upbuilding of Palestine on socialist values, they, too, were unreceptive to the aspirations of the *halutzot*. To the surprise and dismay of the women, the men would accept them into their communes only to perform household duties such as cooking and laundering.

As it transpired, the *halutzim* had no faith in the capacity of the *halutzot* for agricultural labor of any kind. The unequal status of the women also found expression in their daily wages, which were lower than those of the men. They did not enjoy the same voting rights as their male counterparts, and were verbally abused by the men when they failed to cook and clean to their satisfaction. In addition, the work they did was considered inferior by both sexes because it was not connected with the land or the Zionist ideal (Maimon (Fishman), 1955: 85–7; Chabas, 1947: 488–91; Bernstein, 1985: 116–117).

Women were therefore segregated into low-status, low-pay occupations. Any index that measures the degree of occupational segregation would show a value of 100, i.e. total segregation.² The men worked in agricultural production and the women in service, mainly in the kitchen and laundry. In order to understand the factors behind this phenomenon and the steps taken by the women to achieve a more egalitarian distribution, we shall briefly survey the economic theories on occupational segregation.

III. Occupational Segregation: Theories and the Case of Palestine

Economic theory provides two types of explanations for gender differences in occupation: supply-side and demand-side explanations. A supply-side explanation takes into account the possibility that men and women may approach the labor market with different qualifications in terms of their educational background, formal training (both general and specific), experience, or other productivity-related features. Different preferences for certain categories of work or qualifications that differ from those of the male job-seeker, could cause women to earn less or be concentrated in a different set of occupations (Mincer and Polachek, 1974; Polachek, 1981; Tiger and Shepher, 1975; Fuchs, 1989; Blau and Ferber, 1992).

Supply-side explanations emphasize the role of voluntary choice. The discipline of economics tends to view individual decision making as determined by both economic incentive and individual preference. According to this approach, women will avoid jobs that are dangerous, hazardous to the health or unpleasant, and especially those which demand great physical exertion such as work in the fields or operating heavy equipment. On the other hand, they will willingly accept employment in areas that are compatible with household responsibilities or can be easily combined with childbearing and domestic duties. Modern economic theories of the household, first exemplified by Becker (1965) in 'A Theory of the Allocation of Time' (1965), combine labor market economics and home economics through a unified theory of economic decision making. Family decision making and the division of labor between home and market can thus be studied with the help of economic tools. Some economists hold that women allocate more time to housework and childcare as a rational response to comparative advantage (Becker, 1981). Others, such as Fuchs (1989), emphasize women's stronger desire for children and

concern for their welfare. This divergence between men and women in the sphere of personal preference will thus affect occupational choice. Women seek different types of jobs from men: part-time jobs, jobs close to home, and jobs which exact low penalties for work intermittency. Tiger and Shepherd (1975) claim that women have an innate desire to serve, which is why Israeli *kibbutz* women who are relieved of domestic duties at home, choose to work in occupations compatible with housework and childraising, mainly service jobs in the kitchen, laundry and children's houses.³

In the study of economics, preferences are perceived as voluntary and no attempt is made to analyze how they are formed. Sociologists maintain that socialization and social-structural factors are responsible. Societal norms generally determine what is appropriate for each sex, i.e. what is 'masculine' and what is 'feminine', and also classify jobs accordingly. Most people seem to be content with these definitions and gladly adopt the behavior typical of their sex with respect to job aspirations in the same way that they willingly conform in matters of dress, hairstyle and general demeanor (Bergmann, 1986).

Another set of supply-oriented arguments is applied to gender differences in job qualifications and especially human capital. Human capital theory holds that investments in this sphere are geared to improving productivity, and hence occupational status and earning power. Costs are incurred in the expectation of future benefit. Like all investments, an investment in human capital is economically worthwhile if benefits exceed dollar costs. Human capital investments include education, formal training and on-the-job experience. Adherence to traditional gender roles tend to lower investment incentives in women. A woman's shorter work life, the result of staying home during periods of childrearing or engaging in part-time employment, reduces the return on human capital investment. Given the lower benefits, women pursuing traditional roles are likely to make smaller investments in human capital than career-oriented men. Moreover, because skills depreciate and deteriorate when employment is disrupted, women who anticipate discontinuous careers will be attracted to fields where such depreciation is limited (Polachek, 1979, 1981).

Whereas investment in education is the option of the worker, training also involves the decision of the employer. Training may be formal, with the worker participating in a structured trainee or apprenticeship program, or informal, through the assistance of co-workers or a supervisor. Like formal education, training entails both costs and benefits. A trained worker will be more productive and therefore make a greater contribution to the firm's overall revenue. Similarly, trained workers can expect promotion and high wages due to their enhanced productivity. Women will make smaller investments in training and employers will be more reluctant to invest in the specialized training of a female worker because they anticipate a high rate of work interruptions and possible resignation before the benefits of training are reaped.

Demand-side explanations accentuate the role of labor market discrimination. Economists (e.g. Bergmann, 1974, 1986, 1989; Reskin and Hartmann, 1986) define gender labor market discrimination as a situation in which two equally qualified individuals are treated differently on the basis of gender. The foundations for a modern neoclassical analysis of this phenomenon were laid by Becker (1971), who examined the discriminatory

behavior of employers, employees and clients. Employers may discriminate in their hiring and promotion policies and in their payment of wages. Male co-workers may discriminate due to prejudice, disinformation or fear for job security. Representing a male majority, trade unions may discriminate through the hiring hall or apprenticeship system, and industrial unions may discriminate by bargaining for higher wages for men although women may be doing the same work. Another potential source of discrimination is the client, who may object to being served by a female or refuse to patronize establishments that employ women, especially in authoritative positions (Gunderson and Riddell, 1993).

Discrimination against women in the labor market may also result from the male preference for working with or buying from fellow males. Prejudice of this type would particularly target women in supervisory positions or jobs entailing a large measure of responsibility. Another cause of discrimination is disinformation with regard to the value of women in the work force. Such ideas might be generated by females who underestimate their own worth, or by employers or co-workers who are consistently critical of the productivity of female workers. Because information on individual workers is extremely costly to acquire, employers may judge female candidates in the light of the average performance of all females (Lundberg and Startz, 1983). Such statistical judgement may be valuable from the employer's viewpoint, but they often result in discrimination against the individual female. Males may also discriminate to protect their jobs from female competition. They may call upon the power of the government, trade unions and business cartels to insure their standing and further their own ends.

Obviously, discrimination can occur for any or all of the aforementioned reasons. Occupational segregation resulting from discrimination is further reinforced by the feedback effect. Faced with labor market discrimination, women will have even less incentive to invest in human capital. In other words, demand-side and supply-side factors are interrelated. Distinguishing between the various determinants of occupational segregation is doubly salient. It contributes to our understanding of a complex reality, and even more importantly, suggests appropriate strategies and policies for combating the phenomenon.

Now that we have outlined the possible factors behind labor market occupational segregation, we can return to the specific time and place under discussion, i.e. Palestine during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although quantitative data from this period is scarce, we do have many documents that shed light on this subject as enumerated in the introduction. The first question we must ask ourselves is which of the above-mentioned economic theories is applicable to the period in question and adequately explains its division of agricultural labor.

Obviously, women did not choose an inferior position in the labor market of their own free will. The immigrants of the Second *Aliyah* were mostly young and single, and the few married couples among them had no children. The women therefore experienced no conflict between home and career. Moreover, they belonged to a select group of non-religious, highly motivated individuals who rebelled against the social norms and rejected the traditional roles assigned to family and women. Shoshana Bluwstein, a *halutza* of this period, wrote:

What a job it is! All her life cycle, a woman works in the kitchen. 'Kitchen and children' has been the slogan throughout the generations. What has the woman seen in her life? She has never left the children's room or the kitchen. . . The kitchen is a horrible must, but to make a calling out of it? (Bluwstein, 1940: 24)

The *halutzot* had left parents and family abroad with the express purpose of establishing a new society founded on equality. The claim that women enjoy a relative advantage in housework is not applicable here. The *halutzot* had no experience in cooking or any other type of domestic work. They had been accustomed to maids performing these chores at home, and had taken no part in running a household. Without proper cooking utensils and meagre food supplies, their success in the kitchen left much to be desired. Indeed, the poor quality of the food was a constant complaint among the men (Bernstein, 1985).

The women did not conceal their frustration and misery, and demanded a change. The discontent of the *halutzot* at finding themselves confined to the occupational ghetto of the kitchen and household was summed up in 1912 by Sarah Malkin, a prominent *halutza*:

Ideas and aspirations acknowledge no boundaries between young men and women. When we arrived in this country, we hoped to begin practical work immediately. Reality quickly intervened and separated between us. The young men went their way and found their proper role in the country, while we, the young women, did not; we encountered a reality which darkened the beautiful world we had envisaged. Reality may have encumbered the progress of our male comrades, too, but it also endowed them with increased vigor and appetite for work. We, the young women, were faced not with obstacles but with an apathetic and derisive response to all our aspirations. We had hoped to work in the same branches, together with our male comrades who had previously shared our view. However, from the very first step we confronted mockery and insults. We appeared a queer breed to the farmers. They refused to accept the notion of a woman who worked, not out of necessity but in pursuit of an ideal. They found even more incomprehensible the idea of a woman working in the fields and villages. We were suspect in the farmers' eyes and they tried to ward off our influence on their daughters. They did not want us to come near them and perhaps spoil them. As for the male workers, we were also ridiculous in their eyes. This applied not only to women who sought to tear down the presumably natural barriers and take up arduous agricultural pursuits, but also to those of us who engaged in work where we could compete with men. Here, too, we were made to feel ridiculous. (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, March 5, 1912: 14).

The attitude towards the one *halutza* among the founding members of Kibbutz Deganiah, Palestine's first *kibbutz*, was not more favorable. She was confined to the kitchen and her request to work in the vegetable garden or other outdoor branches which would allow her at least a partial contribution to agriculture, was turned down. When the first cow arrived in Deganiah, she felt that milking it should be her job:

However, concern for the success of the farm was so intense, and responsibility weighed so heavily on all members of the commune, that they decided that the merest contact between the female comrade and milking the cow would result in a diminished quantity of milk. They therefore gave her no opportunity to learn the trade, and the 'dairy branch' fell to a superior male comrade. (Fishman, 1929: 15)⁴

As we can see from these and other references, the women's quest for equal occupational opportunities sprang from a desire to take part in the establishment a new nation and society. Their motives were ideological rather than financial; they desired to play a role equal to that of the men in the fulfillment of the Zionist dream.

The main factor behind the exclusion of women from agriculture during this period was discrimination on the part of employers and co-workers based on prejudice and an erroneous perception of the value of women in the labor market. The *halutzim* did not believe that women could cope with the demands of agricultural labor and be productive workers. At a convention of female workers in 1922, Hannah Meisel maintained that men believed the inclusion of women in agriculture would cause financial harm. This belief was due to misconceptions about a woman's ability to work. Meisel's conclusion was that women would be accepted as agricultural laborers only if they proved themselves capable (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, September 22, 1922: 6). For Ada Fishman (Maimon), the first step in this direction was to root out preconceived notions about women. She also claimed that it was the women themselves who often underestimated their own potential (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, February 12, 1926: 6). Another *halutza*, Szulamith Gutgeld, wrote: 'Let's face the truth. Reality has so far proven that a woman stands on a much lower rung in everyday life than a man' (Gutgeld, 1926: 11).

Gutgeld attributed the inferior status of women to two factors. The first related to what she saw as an innate difference in the mental disposition of women, 'something in a girl's psychic makeup that makes it difficult for her to accept labor as a conceivable sphere of activity' (Gutgeld, 1926: 9). The second factor had to do with education and socialization which kept women housebound:

We would surmise that the pettiness and narrowness of contemporary young women is a product of entire generations of education. This education restricted female activity to the confines of the family and rendered the glow of the cradle and dress paramount to a woman above all other social matters about which she had no inkling whatsoever. (Gutgeld, 1926: 11)

These convictions with regard to the inferiority of women probably derived from the patriarchal school that predominated in Eastern Europe. This approach, originating in the eighteenth century, posited that men and women were totally different but complementary. Implicitly, however, superiority was attached to characteristics associated with the male (Tuana, 1992). According to the patriarchal view, men and women each had a role to play which was innate and immutable. It was the perception of the woman's role as limited to reproduction and child-nurturing that spawned the notion of women as inferior (England, 1992). The *halutzim*, no doubt influenced by such thinking, took a narrow view of the skills and abilities of their female counterparts. In their efforts to achieve economic self-sufficiency, they feared that involving women in agriculture would result in a loss of productivity. In 1916, Rachel Yanait, later the wife of Israel's second president, attested to the fact that the *halutzim* were captives of the patriarchal approach:

The male worker belittles [the female worker] and her work. He is a man, the epitome of creation. His ancestors lived in this fashion. This was their attitude to women, and this is how he treats them as well. (*Bein Ha'zmanim*, 1916: 26–8).

Criticism of this state of affairs was very rare at the time. Even those who spoke out on the subject remained close to the official line. Alexander Zaid countered the argument that women were incapable of physical labor by maintaining that household duties and child care were also physically demanding (Blum, 1980: 94). Although he agreed that physical strength was no excuse for gender-based occupational segregation, he still concluded that caring for the household was a woman's job and never even considered the possibility that men might share the burden (Blum, 1980: 95).

As mentioned above, men may also discriminate for reasons of job security. This tendency becomes even more pronounced during periods of recession and unemployment. Unemployment was rampant during the period under discussion, and the *halutzim* faced serious competition from Arab laborers. As a result, they were particularly anxious to prevent females from entering the market. Women were also excluded from training programs conducted by professional agronomists, which caused the gap in skills to widen (Wilkansky, 1918). Interestingly enough, the women did not blame the men for their predicament. They realized that the problem was theirs and that only they could find a solution, the first step being a change in women's attitudes and belief in their own ability. They were aware that low self-esteem on the part of women was a source of disinformation that could cause employers and co-workers to adopt a distorted picture of their labor market value. This self-deprecation needed to be corrected without delay. The *halutzot* thus called upon their sisters 'to cast off the fetters of inner bondage which have shackled women from time immemorial' (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, February 15, 1924: 12–13).

Differences between men and women in the sphere of human capital are held to be a significant factor in occupational segregation by gender. The two main elements of human capital are education and vocational training, with native language proficiency as an additional component. During the period in question, the women were generally more educated than the men, but they had less agricultural training and experience, and were less proficient in Hebrew. Table 1 shows the distribution of educational attainments in 1926 and 1937 on the basis of local censuses conducted in those years.

The figures show that the women had at least as much, if not more schooling than the men. True, the percentage of women who had attended an academic institution was somewhat lower, but a significantly higher proportion of women had graduated from high school, and more women than men had completed at least twelve years of schooling. The data presented in the table relates to the entire labor force. There was some variation according to place of residence, i.e. town, *kibbutz*, *moshava* or *moshav*, but the overall picture was quite similar.

In the sphere of native language proficiency, the women lagged behind the men to some extent. In 1919, 59.3% of the male workers and 57.2% of the female workers reported Hebrew as their main spoken language (Palestine Office of the Zionist Organization, 1919: p.108). Table 2 indicates that some twenty years later, in 1937, fewer women were fluent in Hebrew and the percentage of those who could not speak, read, or write was greater among the women.

Table 1

Distributions (%) of Educational Attainments by Gender, 1926, 1937

Educational Attainments	1926		1937	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Academic	4.4	4.3	8.7	5.6
High school	38.8	44.5	34.9	44.3
Elementary school	31.5	26.2	46.8	43.3
Home education	22.2	20.9	6.1	3.3
Vocational	1.2	0.9	1.4	1.2
No education	1.9	3.2	2.1	2.3
Population size			72,630	31,492

Source: The Second Census of Jewish Workers in Palestine, September 1926; The General Census of Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1938.

Note: Academic - Full or partial academic education
 High school - High school graduates or at least five years of high school study
 Elementary - Elementary school graduates
 Home education - Studies at home or in a *yeshiva* or *cheder*
 Vocational - Any type of vocational education

Table 2

Hebrew Proficiency by Gender, 1937

Level	Speak (%)		Read and write (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Yes	86.7	80.8	81.3	76.8
Some	8.2	10.2	9.2	10.7
No	5.1	9.0	9.5	12.5

Source: The General Census of Jewish Workers in Palestine, January 1938: 56.

Differences in training are recognized as another significant cause of gender-based occupational segregation. Most of the *halutzot* had neither professional training nor experience, and they were well aware that they could not advance without it. As Fishman wrote in 1929: 'A genuine solution to the occupational difficulties of the female worker lies in providing vocational training for women in towns and villages'. (Fishman, 1929: 115; Labor Movement Archives, file 235IV/287I: letter of Workers' Federation (Agricultural Center) to World Zionist Organization, June 16, 1932).

A women's newspaper published in 1937 described this awakening on the part of the *halutzot* of the Second *Aliyah* period:

From the very dawn of the movement, the female immigrants of the Second Aliyah realized that only when they had attained proficiency in a useful trade, following adequate training and practice, could they win for themselves the status of workers and become partners in building an independent economy. . . . Only after achieving these two goals could the *halutzot* view themselves as equal in rights and obligations. (*Dvar Ha'poelet*, May 19, 1937: 59).

Similar statements appeared in a workers' newspaper in 1927 and 1928 (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, February 25, 1927; December 21, 1928).

IV. From Training Farms to Women's Farm Collectives (*Miskei Poalot*)

Realizing that training and practical experience in agriculture were prerequisites for their partnership in the upbuilding of Palestine, the *halutzot* set about organizing a training framework for women. At the initiative of Hannah Meisel, the first women's training farm was established in 1911, on the shores of Lake Kinneret in the Lower Galilee.

In 1909, a number of *halutzot* had successfully tended a vegetable garden in a workers' farm in the Galilee, thereby demonstrating once and for all that women were not incompetent or physically handicapped when it came to farming. In the hopes of achieving a fuller role in cultivating the land, the women decided to undergo a course of agricultural training that would prepare them for this task. The idea was originally broached by Hannah Meisel, a professional agronomist who had immigrated to Palestine in 1909 at the age of 26. Meisel maintained that a special farm for women would bring the *halutzot* up to par and enable them to work alongside the men in an atmosphere of mutual understanding (Fishman, 1929: 18; Shilo, 1980: 91; Izraeli, 1984: 119). She also envisaged the farm as a training vehicle for future farmers' wives – although other women disagreed with her on this point – and therefore advocated the teaching of home economics. In this respect, Meisel's position coincided with that of World Zionist Organization delegates in Palestine, which leads one to speculate that she may have adopted this view in the hope of winning the approval of the organization, since she sought financial assistance and land upon which to establish the farm. Nonetheless, the main purpose of the farm was to train women in agricultural work:

So that they can fulfill their obligations whether as working wives of working farmers, or as independent workers, as members of a collective of young men or women, or on a small farmstead of their own or belonging to someone else, or in any other form. (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, September 22, 1922: 5–6).

In any event, the initiative was supported by the female workers' circles. In the spring of 1911, prior to the establishment of the training farm, they began to lobby for the introduction of new agricultural branches that would be more physically suitable for women. These included vegetable-growing, poultry and livestock. Until then, the Jewish agricultural economy in Palestine had been based primarily on plantations and grain. Indeed, the major areas of training at the Kinneret farm were in these new branches, although management of plantations was also on the curriculum (Shilo, 1980: 97, 106; Izraeli, 1984: 120).

The first agricultural training farm for women was set up in 1911 beside Lake Kinneret, not far from a cluster of Jewish farm colonies in the Lower Galilee. The land was owned

by the Jewish National Fund, the arm of the World Zionist Organization that handled land reclamation in Palestine. Twenty young women were trained at the Kinneret farm on a regular basis until it closed down in 1917 due to budgetary problems brought on by World War I.

The importance of agriculture to Zionism and the Zionist labor movement intensified all the more after World War I. A new wave of young socialist pioneers with a social and ideological profile similar to those of the pre-war period made their way to Palestine between 1919 and 1923. This time, the percentage of women was sizeable – around 18%. Although the ideal of these *halutzot* was to work in agriculture on *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*, the capacity for absorption of such frameworks was naturally limited and some of the women settled in the cities as well. Here, too, they sought productive occupations and fought to be recognized on a par with the men (Fishman, 1929: 149; Izraeli, 1984: 126–7).

The training model adopted by the Kinneret farm was proven successful when its graduates began to find jobs in various agricultural branches (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, September 22, 1922: 6). Henceforth it was hailed by the Women Workers' Movement and its affiliates as the chosen method for training *halutzot* and creating occupational parity in the sphere of agriculture (*Dvar Ha'polet*, January 24, 1937: 202). It was realized that a women's training farm was the way:

To assist our female comrade in penetrating the agricultural economy and occupying her rightful place in life and work. A male comrade who has no trade can use his physical strength and take confidence in his prowess. This is not so for the female. She will not be accepted on a farm because of her physical strength. . . . They will only employ her in household work. However, from the moment she becomes a professional and develops a sense of responsibility, motivation and self-confidence, she will succeed in entering the market and occupying a place equal to that of the men. Therefore acquiring agricultural skills and preparing oneself psychologically for labor is more essential for the female than the male. (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, September 22, 1922: 5, 8; *Dvar Hapolet*, January 24, 1937: 206).

The driving force behind such farms were women 'who were deeply convinced that providing agricultural training was vital for the independence and initiative of the female worker and would allow her creative power to come forth' (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, July 5, 1932: 23).

Prior to World War I, only one training farm existed. In the post-war years, as the number of *halutzot* who saw their future in agriculture increased, training facilities – now called women's farm collectives – began to multiply. The goal, aside from the training function, was to demonstrate that women were capable of managing a farm and even achieving self-sufficiency (Fishman, 1929: 15). It should be emphasized that at the beginning of the 1920s, the idea of a mixed economy won credence. This was to the advantage of the women because the branches proposed were not as physically taxing as grain farming. Among the branches taught on the women's farms were vegetable-growing, nursery management, dairy farming, poultry, bee-keeping, fruit farming and flower-growing. Cereal crops were grown on only a few of the farms, and even then, on a limited basis (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, September 22, 1922: 2; Fishman, 1930: 80).

A memorandum submitted to the Labor Movement in the early 1920s underscored the goals and guiding principles of the women's farm collectives:

It is a well-known fact that the young female pioneer who enters a mixed commune of men and women without prior agricultural training spends an appreciable portion of her productive years in household work. She never learns important domestic skills such as growing vegetables, raising chickens and milking a cow, which ought to be female branches. One reason for this is the limited number of agricultural branches which make up the economy. . . . As a result, the few female workers are sent to the kitchen and laundry, while their male counterparts do the work in the dairy, chicken coop, etc. *Due to lack of training* [authors' emphasis], the *halutzot* are incapable of displaying any initiative or developing branches that can provide sustenance. The women's farm collective will be a permanent fixture, with workers rotated from time to time after they acquire the necessary skills. On such a farm, the female worker will gain an education that will enable her to become an independent creator; she will learn to manage a farm on her own, and to shoulder all the responsibility. The women's farm will serve as a school for adults where a woman can simultaneously learn a profession and earn her livelihood from it. (Fishman, 1929: 150).

All in all, a total of six women's farm collectives were established in Palestine during the 1920s, providing training facilities for 120 female workers. The Women Workers' Movement received assistance for this purpose from both the Zionist Organization and the Labor Movement. Each farm had a set of by-laws to govern its operation. The duration of the training period was two years, with at least six months of specialization in each branch to allow the farm to function properly on a day-to-day basis. The training cycle was organized in such a fashion that no more than 50% of the workers completed their stint at one time. If conditions on the farm warranted it, the management could ask graduates to continue for an additional year after the two-year period was up (Labor Movement Archives, file 235IV/18/II; Fishman, 1929: 240–1).

The last two regulations reflected the importance attached to economic viability. The *halutzot* were determined 'to prove to ourselves and those on the outside that we are capable of performing productive labor and supporting ourselves by it' (Fishman, 1929: 151). If a women's collective incurred deficits 'activity would cease and the economic ability of the female worker would receive a grade of "unsatisfactory"' (Fishman, 1929: 151; *Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, December 21, 1928: 18–19). Success in this endeavour was crucial if female workers were to have a sense of power and worth, and stop considering themselves superfluous. It was also felt that the existence of women's collectives would be an incentive for more *halutzot* to immigrate to Palestine (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, January 12, 1926: 12 and July 5, 1937: 23; *Dvar Ha'polet*, May 19, 1937: 59).

Life on the women's collectives was communal and founded on equality for all. Work was managed by an elected committee, and every decision was brought to a vote before the entire collective. In this manner, the women shared responsibility for the operation of the farm and had a stake in its success. Training in various branches was provided by male and female experts, some of them graduates of the farm and advisors of the Jewish Agency's Agricultural Experimentation Station (Fishman, 1929: 153–4; Labor Movement Archives, file 230IV/18/II: Plan for Consolidating Women's Farm Collectives Established by the Zionist Executive).

A report prepared in 1927 by the Agricultural Center of the Workers' Federation clearly shows the value and importance attached to these women's farms by the Zionist leadership:

The women's farm collectives are one of the most interesting and successful innovations of the workers in Palestine. The Jewish female worker has liberated herself in one fell swoop from the shackles of generations; she has thrown herself into labor and has displayed an abundance of talent, responsibility and initiative. Members of these farms have devotedly and assiduously nurtured their creation and have not stinted any labor in order to elevate these farms to the summit which they merit. The existing women's farm collectives accurately reflect the capability of the Jewish female pioneer workers who left their home and Diaspora lifestyle behind, and have lent their hand to an innovative creation of the workers. These collectives have proven invaluable not only as a vehicle for sound agricultural preparation, but they have helped raise a cadre of female workers who by employing their initiative and sense of responsibility will gain their rightful place in the economic enterprise [in Palestine]. (Maimon (Fishman), 1955: 88).

Hence the women's farm collectives were both a training site and a framework that facilitated the entry of women into the agricultural labor market. The ultimate goal was not just occupational equality, but equal social status among the Jewish pioneers in that women could now contribute equally in the sphere of settlement (*Dvar Ha'poelet*, March 31, 1935, p. 17 and July 18, 1935: 106; *Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, December 28, 1928: 16–17 and July 30, 1935: 23). These farms also played an educational and social role by fostering the independence of women who turned to agriculture, and bolstering the growing Women Workers' Movement. This movement widened its activities appreciably in the 1920s and 1930s as it fought for the social, legal and employment rights of women.

Yet another task of the women's farm collective in the 1920s was the absorption of new immigrants and unemployed female workers. The agricultural sector had been hard hit by the economic crisis which plagued Palestine during this period, and the job market for women in both town and village was severely depressed (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, Feb. 12, 1926: 11–12; Labor Movement Archives, file 235IV/341a: protocol of meeting with representatives of the women's farm collectives, October 1926). With this situation in mind, the Women Workers' Movement proposed the establishment of a new and larger farm which could train 200 women at a time. The level of theoretical and practical instruction on this farm would be much higher – an improvement which was difficult to implement on the existing small scale. The Zionist bodies proved amenable to this request, and allocated 500 dunams of land south of Tel Aviv for the new collective. This favorable response was first and foremost a recognition that women's farms were an effective means of securing vocational equality for women who wished to work in agriculture (Maimon (Fishman), 1955: 103–4; *Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, January 7, 1926: 10–11).

A large women's farm called Ayanot was set up in the early 1930s outside Tel Aviv, not far from the *moshavot*. It became the principal agricultural training site for women in Palestine, and specialized in all farm branches common at the time – not only those perceived as suitable for women. In the citrus grove, stretching over 100 dunams, the women learned fertilizing, irrigating and grafting techniques, as well as how to pick and pack the fruit. There were also vineyards and olive groves, and a nursery where the

students grew various types of trees and flowers. They tended a vegetable garden, and learned to cultivate and harvest legumes and grains for animal fodder. Landscape gardening provided an opportunity to grow flowers and other decorative plants. The women worked in the chicken coops and hatchery, caring for 2,000 hens, and were taught the rudiments of raising cows and operating a dairy. There was even an apiary on the premises to instruct the women in bee-keeping. In addition, they learned to use farm machinery and attended classes in home economics.

Theoretical studies totalled 640 hours over the course of two years. Subjects included chemistry, physics, botany, zoology and geography. The women also learned about soil types, fertilization, irrigation, field and garden crops, nurseries, landscape gardening, flower-growing, plantations, animal husbandry, poultry, bee-keeping, nutrition, farm and household management, budgeting, first aid and hygiene. Likewise, they attended 60 hours of lectures on Hebrew literature, Zionism, women in Zionism, and the history of the Labor and Women Workers' movements in Palestine. These lectures were important because they strengthened the students' Zionist background and inculcated the values of the labor and women's movements. In contrast to the highly-conscious *halutzot* of the First *Aliyah*, the women who came to Ayanot, many of whom were new immigrants, had never been exposed to such ideas (Labor Movement Archives, file 235IV/622; Prospectus for Ayanot, 1939; *Ha'boker*, February 9, 1940: 4; Davar, September 21, 1938: 3; Maimon, 1957). This is why:

The women's farm collectives fulfill a role beyond that of a training institution for agriculture and home economics; they are also entrusted with imparting a solid foundation in pioneering ideology and Hebrew language skills. In general, the women who have arrived or are still to arrive at our door have not been educated in Zionism or imbibed from the wellsprings of Judaism. The collectives must remedy these deficiencies and supplement what the immigrants missed in their countries of origin. . . . Our job is to create a pioneering lifestyle. (*Dvar Ha'polet*, Feb. 14, 1939: 258)

V. The Women's Farm Collectives Evaluated

The major question was whether the women's farm collectives were indeed successful in achieving their goals, namely providing agricultural technical education for women and pursuantly helping them to surmount the barriers to their integration in agricultural work. To answer this and other questions, the Zionist Executive nominated a committee of three members, including Hannah Meisel, to carry out a follow-up of 201 women who had completed such programs. The committee, which commenced its work on November 23, 1928, found that 136 of these women (67%) were employed on agricultural settlements. Of the remaining 65, 19 resided and worked in towns (9.4%), 14 had left the country (7.0%), and 32 could not be located (15.9%). Some of those whose whereabouts were unknown were presumed to be employed in agriculture. The committee was able to trace the addresses of 71 women, of whom 65 (90%) were found to be working on *kibbutzim*, *moshavim* and *moshavot*. After visiting these settlements and interviewing the women, the committee concluded that they were qualified to perform agricultural labor in all forms and in a variety of branches (Central Zionist Archives, file S25/7152, S15/510: Committee of inquiry on women's farm collectives).

The findings for 1928, which relate to 71 graduates at most, are corroborated by general, comprehensive data. It is known that some 2,000 women completed their training at farm collectives and presumably found a niche in the agricultural settlements of Palestine. Unfortunately, the follow-up was not continued beyond the original 201, and we have no data on the occupational distribution of the majority of these women once they left the collectives. According to a census conducted by the General Federation of Clerical Workers in Palestine in 1937, 4,456 out of 7,497 men living on *kibbutzim* (59%) were employed in agriculture, compared with 3,416 out of 6,562 women (52%). The figures for *moshavot* were 10,983 out of 19,188 men (57%) as compared to 4,501 out of 7,592 women (59%). Thus the percentage of women doing farm work on *moshavim* was higher than that of men, whereas the percentage on *kibbutzim* was somewhat lower. Although we have no way of determining how many of these women were trained on farm collectives, there is no reason why the proportions should be different.

Another source maintains that over 70% of the graduates found work in agriculture and occupied prestigious positions in this sphere (*Dvar Ha'poelet*, February 14, 1939: 257). Many of them were responsible for setting up new agricultural branches on *kibbutzim* and *moshavot* (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, March 19, 1942: 10–11). Over the course of 13 years, the largest collective, Ayanot, reportedly produced 800 graduates hailing from 22 countries and speaking 14 different languages. 85% of this group were employed in farming – 42% on *kibbutzim*, 27% on *moshavot*, and 4% on women's farm collectives as trainers and instructors (*Ha'poel Ha'tzair*, July 11, 1943: 43; *Ha'aretz*, February 29, 1940: 4). It was claimed that the graduates of women's farm collectives played a significant role in shaping women's attitude towards work and occupational equality (*Dvar Ha'poelet*, May 21, 1935: 17), and that the hundreds who were trained in these programs would produce a new generation of instructors to continue the work of their predecessors. In 1937, the *halutzot* noted with satisfaction: 'Today, looking back on our course, we can state that we kept the faith with our forbears who established the farm collectives.' (*Dvar Ha'poelet*, January 24, 1937: 208)

Bearing in mind that the *halutzot* of the first and second decades of the century were assigned exclusively to the kitchen and laundry, the achievements we have cited in the realm of agriculture are worthy indeed. The training offered by the women's collectives, combined with a gradual change in attitude, contributed greatly to the decline in occupational segregation by gender. Whereas female agricultural workers were virtually non-existent during the first decade, by 1937, over half the women on *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* were employed in this sphere.

VI. Summary and Conclusions

The conditions in Palestine at the beginning of the century were ostensibly conducive to occupational equality among the *halutzim* and *halutzot*. There was a deep ideological commitment to equality, an esteem for those who worked the land, and a general atmosphere favorable to the redefinition of sex roles. Nevertheless, this paper finds that occupational segregation by gender was the norm, with women allowed into the kitchen and laundry but barred from any form of agricultural work. This fact is well-known, and has been documented by historians and sociologists. Our contribution is method-

ological; we have analyzed the phenomenon and the possible factors behind it from an economic perspective. Utilizing supply- and demand-side explanations for occupational segregation, we found that both categories were applicable during this period. Discrimination and disinformation were widespread, fed by the social norms and beliefs common in the immigrants' countries of origin. These factors were reinforced by gender differences in training, which is a major component of human capital. The women who were denied agricultural and vocational training realized that to change the situation they could rely only on themselves. In consequence, they established self-sufficient training farms, and later women's collectives, where women could obtain theoretical and practical knowhow. The results were highly impressive, and most of the graduates were absorbed in agricultural settlements as successful workers in the vegetable garden, cowshed, orchard, poultry run, etc.

In the early twentieth century, such an activist response to segregation was certainly unique. This was long before the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s, and the strategies adopted were more progressive and more radical than those generally employed by feminists. Self-sufficient women's collectives proved beyond a doubt that women could be independent, professionally qualified and successful, given an equal chance. These measures also helped to change both male and female attitudes towards the capability and skillfulness of women.

We hope that this economically-oriented analysis will provide a fresh insight into the historical record of Jewish settlement in Palestine prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. In addition, there is a practical lesson to be learned, namely that protest, legislation and public opinion are not always sufficient to alleviate the plight of an oppressed group. Affirmative action must be taken in order to combat the factors underlying the oppression. Moreover, such action will prove most efficient if it is carried out by the oppressed themselves.

Notes

1. *Moshav* (plural: *moshavim*): smallholders' settlement based on family holdings and a wide measure of cooperation in marketing and purchasing.
Moshava (plural: *moshavot*) : village based on family units with no institutionalized cooperation.
Kibbutz (plural: *kibbutzim*): a small rural cooperative. No salaries are paid. Production is pooled and distributed between the members to accomodate their needs.
2. The most common index is Duncan's Index of Dissimilarity, formulated in 1955. The index is defined as $D = \frac{1}{2} \sum |m_i - f_i|$, where m_i is the percentage of men in occupation i and f_i is the percentage of women in the same occupation. The summation runs across all occupations. The index ranges from 0 (no segregation) to 100 (total segregation), with the actual value of the index interpreted as the percentage of women (or men) who would have to change occupations for the employment distribution of the two groups to be identical. Other suggested indices are the G- Segregation Index (Silber, 1989), Watts' Index (Watts, 1992), and others.
3. Tiger and Shepherd's work is chauvinistic in tone. For example, they claim that women are eager to work in the kitchen 'to cook, serve, wash dishes and carry out demanding aesthetic performances in presenting food – something that may expose women's egos two or three times daily to the test of their families' approval' (Tiger and Shepherd, 1975: 29).

4. This has not changed significantly even today. Gender-oriented occupational segregation on the *kibbutz* is much more widespread than elsewhere in Israel. Women are generally assigned to service jobs in the kitchen, laundry, children's houses, etc. (Neuman, 1991).

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